



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

WHY?

BY WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

AFTER these nine months of the manifold murder in Europe begun by Germany, we who hold her guilty of all the harm that can flow from the largest evil ever let loose upon the world may fitly take stock of our reasons and convictions, not so much as against Germany as in favor of England and France, and especially England. Why do we still believe as powerfully in her cause as at the first? It is easy to say because it is the cause of liberty, of humanity, of Christianity; that it is something like a last hope of mankind; that if it fails civilization will no longer be free in Europe or America, but will become the dismal condition of soldier-slaves enthralling and enthralled. But to say this does not seem enough. One wishes to count and recount one's convictions, to repeat again that the party of the Allies is the party, above everything, of peace, the party of hope, of the equal right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, of everything endeared by the Declaration and guarded by the Constitution. That was what we felt at the first, but as the bright days of the early resistance to the German ravage of Belgium and plunge into France dulled into days of dogged endeavor to hold the water-soaked trenches of the fighting-line, and the blind artillery duel continued by telescope and telephone between the adversaries; when victory and defeat were doled out by inches to one side or the other in the West, and in the East the sudden triumph of the Russian millions turned into rout which not even the change of name from St. Petersburg to Petrograd could stay, we Americans who were with the Allies heart and soul began involuntarily to ask ourselves why.

We did not ask why so much, if at all, with regard to France. That remained the perfectly clear case it was at the beginning. Her home had been invaded and her very life threatened by Germany as the sole escape from the pretended menace or

danger of Russia. The same atrocious contempt of neutral rights which animated her in her invasion of Belgium was the savage impulse that carried her over the French border almost to the forts of Paris. There was everything in the French situation to move us in behalf of France, and we who are not a very generous nation could individually give our moral support to the most generous of the nations without qualification. Usually we forget that we owe our national existence to France, but in that moment of her insult and outrage we did remember that we were alive because of that foster-mother of ours. We had remembered more constantly the unnatural severity of our own natural mother, and if we had not felt so strongly that she was fighting the same battle which her oppression had forced us to fight against her, we might have hesitated to give her our whole hearts.

I do not think we did hesitate in that hour of her appeal to the instincts of all free peoples. The English, though not nearly so much as the Germans, have since felt the need of instructing our preference; but they have not waited our asking to tell us that they were fighting our battle against militarism, and that if they fell under its iron hoofs it would be our turn next, and it would be an easy walk-over for those hoofs. I do not believe that we took counsel of our fears in the matter, though we had great reason to do so in our defenselessness. We who were for the Allies gave England our sympathy as unstintedly as we gave it to France, and with no fear of the German success shaken in our faces. We did not expect that success, and we do not expect it now; we have steadfastly trusted in the righteousness of England's cause, and in the power which has enabled her to compass the lands and seas of the whole world, and hold them fast in the fear or affection of the mightiest empire in history. Let Germany rage her little hour with her millions of conscripts, her submarines shattering peaceful ships, and her aeroplanes dropping bombs on the roofs of undefended towns and murdering women and children at their doors and in their beds. The hour will be little indeed beside that spacious day which must come as surely as the dawn follows the dark, when the English spirit of freedom shall lastingly prevail against her convulsive force and hold her homicidal epilepsy in sanative control.

I do not forget, in this prophesying, all the guilt and all the greed of England in the past. I do not forgive her the destruction of the South-African republics in the recent past

which is almost the present. That indeed was the effect of the greed, the insatiate lust of dominion, of the imperial appetite which had come with eating. Still less do I forget the injuries which we suffered from her in our nonage, the manifold oppressions and repressions which welded our colonial disunity into the unity of these sovereign States. Still harder to forget are the slights and snubs which she put upon us in our national infancy, the insolent disregard of our international equality, and finally and most unforgettable of all, her laugh of exultation when our fear came, and she could hope that slavery might be the death of that freedom which we had learned from her to love, and which was the life-breath of the Republic devoted by her ill-will to destruction. No American who has read American history can be ignorant of the treacheries and atrocities she practised against us in both her wars with us; the loosing of cruel savages upon our frontiers, the hiring of German mercenaries to meet our armies in battle; the imprisonment of our seamen by thousands, and the horrors of the prison-ships; the contempt of our appeal to arms till the prowess of our Yankee privateers on every sea and the aim of our Kentucky riflemen at New Orleans taught her to respect us a little; and then in the Civil War the eager rush of English sympathy with the slaveholders, and the destruction of our commerce by the Confederate cruisers fitted and manned in English ports. The tale is long and need not be told in full, but if we were to vent our sense of injury from England in a hate-song, such as the Germans have used to keep their anger warm, our reasoned grievances would make that detestable outburst appear the explosion of senseless passion in Bedlam.

We need not run back for quantity in our memories of injury from the England of that class which has hitherto been her ruling class. In our keenest sense of that injury we have always, unless we were very stupid and ignorant, been aware of two Englands, of another and a better England than that ruling England, the England which has been our friend, and the friend of every righteous cause. In our struggle for Independence the wisest and truest and kindest of Englishmen were our friends; in our struggle for Union these again were of our side. There are indeed two Englands: one that never forgets a friend once accepted, and one that never makes a friend whom injustice and insult could alienate. Hitherto it is the spirit of that evil England which has ruled England; but in these latest years

we who have loved English liberty and hoped that somehow "in the far-off divine event" it would become American equality, have learned to believe that the better England had come into her own. We have seen a more equal tax wrung, however grudgingly, from the great nobles who had left the commons to pay an unjust share; we have seen, with shame for ourselves, national pensions voted to outworn labor, and the growth of good will between the classes and the masses. We have seen such things as these, and through the storm of obloquy poured out on the sturdy Celt who has forced this justice from the hand of Norman and Saxon we have made bold to hope for a day when the eyes of England should be purged of the dazzle of kings and nobles which has kept her blind to the glory of common manhood. We knew that our vision must be vain for yet a time indefinitely long, but we kept saying to ourselves, "Why not, at the end of this volcanic uprush of hell over the lands so long peaceful, should not there be a federation of the world which should at least prophesy, if not establish, the universal republic and make 'the game of kings' forever impossible?"

That was the secret at the bottom of true American hearts in their prayer for England's success in the war, and it is still the hope that animates us, though we deny it or avow it with shrinking and something like shame. From militarized Germany, from that dead corpse of medieval oppression, galvanized into an ecstasy of murder and rapine, humanity can hope nothing; but from England it can hope something, not everything, perhaps not much, but something.

It is because we hope for this something, much or little, that we wish England godspeed on the hard, perhaps long, road before her. It is because we love humanity, and hope from English liberty American equality that we earnestly desire her success in yonder hideous carnage. It is not because we hate the Germans or love the English; many of us love the Germans, and feel them *gemüthlich*, though they dine at one o'clock and eat with their knives. Most of us love England and love her dearly; we know home-and-mother when we breathe her air and feel her stinted sunshine; but do many of us love the English, say, in the lump, or do we any of us? We love certain Englishmen when we get to know them, as much as they will let us, but for the English in general, or even in particular, not all of us have much use. We have no use at all for their patriotism; for England as the head of

the British Empire we do not care, but we care everything for her as the hope of the human race; everything, everything. The Englishman, especially the English journalist or poet, or other vocal person, seems not to understand this, and addresses us lively reproaches because we do not share his insular or imperial patriotism, not realizing in his own case that the patriotism of another is something almost offensive, like the warmth of another's person. It astonishes him, therefore, that we should say we are with him heart and soul, and yet look it so little. He cannot understand why we should not be ashamed to bother him with protest and question when we see him so busy fighting for his life and our own lives. Well, I, for one, wish we could have forborne those protests and questions, though I do not see how we could; or how without a word we could let England sweep our commerce from the seas as thoroughly as her Confederate cruisers did in our Civil War that she should not be hampered by it in her struggle for mankind against the enemy of mankind. I, for one, am ashamed that we seem already to have forgotten the abominable violence to all law by the Germans in their raids by sea and sky against defenseless towns, Belgian, French, and English, or that we must address Berlin in the same diplomatic terms of question as London. Of course, I know that I speak for no larger portion of the Republic than resides in any one citizen of it, but I know other citizens who think like me, many others. At the same time I know this will not satisfy the English. They want a great deal more good will from us than this; more than, for instance, they showed for us when they framed a treaty with Japan to support her in a certain event if she was at war with us. Nothing, in fact, would really satisfy the English short of our going to war with Germany, and that I hope we shall not do till the German submarines attack our home-keeping navy and their Zeppelins infest our atmosphere and begin dropping bombs on Boston.

But in spite of the unreasonableness of such Englishmen, every American who loves the liberty which his own country represents must heartily, prayerfully wish England well in this Titanic struggle with the Satanic powers of Germany. Apparently it is the affair of Belgium, who has fought on to her political extinction in it, though we know she shall rise again in a glorious resurrection. Still more apparently it is the affair of France, which is pushing the invader with dogged (one might say bull-dogged) self-devotion from her soil. Apparently it is

the affair of Russia in the incessant vicissitudes of progress and regress through that Eastern war scene which shine as triumphs at Petrograd and darkle as routs at Berlin. It seems even the affair of Portugal, but just how we cannot say. But above all and through all it is England's job to beat down, if not to bind, those forces of evil which the Allies are fighting. That is distinctly her job, as one hundred years ago it was her job to beat down and bind the forces which a far less formidable enemy of mankind had loosed upon the world. Success will come to her now as surely as it came to her then, and with success will come the question of what to do with her success. There is no St. Helena which can jail the malignant spirit of militarism, but somehow it can and must be destroyed. England, by and with the advice and consent of France and Belgium, will know how to deal with the question, and, leaving Japan and Portugal out of the matter, she will doubtless know how to deal with her fellow-victor Russia; for somehow that strange mass of apparent inability must finally be dealt with. We have just seen how France and England have tried to undo their united work of sixty years ago and open to Russia the sea which they then closed against her, and doubtless they will find some way of utilizing in the great dénouement their unwieldy partner in the tremendous drama now enacting. Russia may represent to dramatic criticism the humorous element which Shakespeare finds the relief and contrast of his tragedy, but almost anything is predicable of that vast despotism which ought logically to be as bad as Prussian militarism, or worse. A people converted to Christianity by sovereign mandate, and baptized at one plunge in the river whither they were herded for salvation, have now been devoted to Prohibition by the same power and saved a second time, while other nations are still striving toward that ideal by a course of moderate drinking. Who knows, then, but in the day of reckoning for Germany the Czar may not issue a ukase declaring his subjects the citizens of a free and independent Republic, and endowing them with the Initiative and Referendum, the Recall and Woman Suffrage, with himself for their first President ineligible for re-election?

In the forecast which I am here indulging anything appears possible, and it is not morally impossible but England may submit the inevitable Russian question to the arbitration of these States. She may remember the cherished fable of friendship between that Empire and this Republic, tacitly attested by sealed instructions to the Russian fleet which visited our shores

during the Civil War to defend us against an attack of the French and English, and she may conceive it graceful to leave the Russian case to us. England has more of the virtues that convince the reason than the charms that win the affection of other nations; but a graceful thing is not beyond her, as we have lately seen in her letting our contraband ship *Dacia* fall a prey to our ancient ally France instead of capturing and confiscating the vessel herself. That was a delicate forbearance worthy of our ideal of ourselves; and throughout our exchange of civilities with her concerning neutral rights it seems to me that England has behaved with signal patience and polite forbearance when we could not have helped ourselves if she had done otherwise. To have done otherwise we should have tended to cast our lot where our will could never be, with Germany. We cannot, indeed, cast our lot with the Allies, but our will must be with them always because, as I began by saying, they are in the right, if there is any such thing as right or wrong. If it is wrong to build up a ruthless power by a system of worldwide espionage, to fortify a bad cause by every art of treachery and deceit, and then to use that power with arrogant disregard of all the international traditions, and all the laws of religion, and all the impulses of humanity, Germany is wrong and England is right, and that is why we must wish England well, whatever becomes of our questions and protests.

My own neutrality is of such measure and make that I would have our nation bear everything from the belligerents short of invading our shores after sinking all our ships. But I would have our Government continue registering its protests as a sort of charges to be paid off at some day of reckoning in the future. Something like this was managed in the case of England and her *Alabama*, which she settled without breach of the peace, from a conscience quickened by our insistence. Meanwhile the great Because which answers my Why is that England is—

the land that freemen till,
That sober-suited Freedom chose,
The land where, girt with friends or foes,
A man may speak the things he will.—

and that in Germany he may not without danger of going to jail for it.

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS.



WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS
THE EDITOR OF THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW IN 1872